

form schemes or indulge expectations essentially incongruous with the nature of man. Perhaps however you will say, What is that nature? Is it not a mere passive thing, variable almost to infinity, according to climate, to institutions, and to the different ages of time? Even taking it in a civilized state, what relation is there between such a form of human nature as that displayed at Sparta, and, for instance, the modern society denominated Quakers, or the Moravian Fraternity? And how can we ascertain what is congenial with it or not, unless itself were first ascertained? Allow me to say, that I speak of human nature in its most general principles only, as social, self-interested, inclined to the wrong, slow to improve, passing through several states of capacity and feeling in the successive periods of life, and the few other such permanent distinctions. Any of these distinctions may vanish from the sight of a visionary mind, while forming, for itself, or for others, such schemes as could have sprung only from an imagination become wayward through its uncontrolled power, and its victory over sober reason. I remember, for example, a person, very young I confess, who was so enchanted with the stories of Gregory Lopez, and one or two more pious hermits, as almost to form the resolution to betake himself to some wilderness and live as Gregory did. At any time, the very word *hermit* was enough to transport him, like the witch; broomstick, to the solitary hut, which was delightfully surrounded by shady solemn groves, mossy rocks, crystal streams, and gardens of radishes. While this fancy lasted he forgot the most obvious of all facts, that man is not made for habitual solitude, nor can endure it without misery except when transformed into a genuine superstitious ascetic;—questionable whether even then.*

Contrary to human nature, is the proper description of those theories of education, and those flatteries of parental hope, which presume that young people in general may be

* Lopez indeed was often visited by pious persons who sought his instructions; this was a great modification of the loneliness, and of the trial involved in enduring it; but my hermit was fond of the idea of an uninhabited island, or of a wilderness so deep that these good people would not have been able to come at him, without a more formidable pilgrimage than was ever yet made for the sake of obtaining instruction.